

Washington, DC – Today, U.S. Congressman Mike Pence (R-IN) and U.S. Congressman Adam Schiff (D-CA), co-chairmen of the Congressional Caucus for Freedom of the Press, released the following joint statement on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day:

"For almost two decades, World Press Freedom Day has served as a reminder of the vital importance of freedom of the press to human rights around the world. Journalists put their lives on the line every single day to bring us news from across the globe, including from countries with repressive regimes, overreaching governments, and war zones. Today is a day in which we celebrate the indispensable role played by journalists in exposing abuses of power and putting themselves in harm's way.

"Anytime a journalist is assaulted, it is an assault on all of us, and on the world's need for timely and accurate information. This year journalists have made incredible sacrifices, with many being beaten, targeted and sometimes killed. According to Reporters without Borders, in 2011 sixty-seven journalists across the world were killed for bringing us free and fair information, and in 2012, twenty-one journalists have already lost their lives. According to Freedom House, only 14.5 percent of the world's inhabitants live in a country with a free press. This is unacceptable, and today we want take this opportunity to 'shine the light' on a country where being a journalist can be a death sentence.

"In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad has cracked down on ordinary citizens and journalists alike, imposing a blackout on any independent, non-state sponsored reporting, barring foreign reporters from entering the country, and even detaining and attacking journalists who try to cover protests against his oppressive regime. So far, more than 10 journalists have died while reporting since November 2011, and the regime is currently imprisoning at least thirteen journalists and press freedom activists. We are calling on the Assad government to release these captives immediately and end the media blackout.

"The United States must promote freedom in all its forms, because while many Americans take for granted the right to a free and independent press, for most of the world it is a constant struggle. And in the evolving digital media world, press freedom has to take on new mediums – including advocacy and reporting on Twitter, Facebook, blogs and satellite channels. Today, we pay tribute to journalists around the world, saluting their never-ending bravery and reflecting on the importance of their work to advance the most basic human right – freedom."

Last month, Pence and Schiff introduced a resolution (H. Res. 629) condemning the killing of journalists in Syria and calling on the government to open the country up to independent and foreign news media and end its media blackout.

Information on the Caucus: The Press Freedom Caucus is a bipartisan caucus aimed at advancing press freedom around the world. The Congressional Caucus for the Freedom of the Press, co-chaired by Reps. Mike Pence (R-IN) and Adam Schiff (D-CA), creates a forum to combat and condemn media censorship and the persecution of journalists around the world.

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